

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Audit shows bias in rental screening process

**PORTLAND, OREGON – APRIL 21, 2011:** Combating discrimination in the rental market requires deliberate collaboration among property managers, renter advocacy groups and local government agencies, and the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB) is taking the lead in convening a broad coalition to accomplish just that.

PHB has been charged to convene thoughtful stakeholders to examine and influence recommendations and actions steps for Multnomah County's "Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI)."

One data set that the AI committee has examined closely is the recent discrimination "audit testing" conducted by the Fair Housing Council of Oregon (FHCO), on behalf of PHB.

Testing conducted in Multnomah County focused on two protected classes: race (African-American compared to white); and national origin (Latino compared to white).

Auditing the tests unveiled differences in treatment across many areas of the rental screening process, including cost of renting units, move-in specials, moving costs, deposit and lease terms, among others.

Of the race tests, 15 showed different treatment while 10 did not, whereas of the national origin tests 17 showed different treatment while 2 did not. African-American and Latino testers were quoted higher rental and moving costs, and more stringent lease terms.

"While discrimination may not be intentional, it has the same impact: people of color and immigrants face bias in the rental market," says Housing Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau. "PHB and FHCO are serious about ending discrimination toward people renting apartments, and these results are an opportunity for us to candidly address some of the problems that racial and ethnic groups face today."

### Strategies for Improvement

While the Fair Housing Advisory Committee is looking at a broad spectrum of discrimination occurring throughout the continuum of housing services, among its key priorities is ensuring that people have equitable access to safe, decent, affordable and accessible rental units. Among the committee's draft recommendations include:

- County-wide funding and support to continue and enhance fair housing services, including but not limited to enforcement and education of fair housing laws.
- Create a Fair Housing Advocacy Committee that meets on an at least quarterly basis to focus on fair housing issues and to be a strong advocate voice for Multnomah County.
- Partner with local organizations to ensure frequent and accurate trainings for property managers.
- Modify screening criteria that has inadvertently higher impact on protected classes.
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate information regarding rights and resources.

As a member of the Fair Housing Advisory Committee, Deborah Imse, executive director of the Metro Multi-Family Housing Association (MMHA), stresses the importance of educating landlords and property managers about Fair Housing Law.

“Fair housing education has never been more important. Landlords have an obligation to offer the same opportunities and the same policies for the same housing unit. Consistent application and inquiry processes can help keep all landlords from violating fair housing laws, even unintentionally,” says Imse, who also serves on PHB’s Portland Housing Advisory Commission.

For Commissioner Fish, the committee’s recommendations are a solid step toward addressing fair housing issues.

“Equitable access to housing is at the forefront of Portland Housing Bureau’s mission, and I am personally committed to ensuring that everyone has access to a safe, decent and affordable place to live,” says Commissioner Fish.

“Government has a role in ensuring equitable access to housing opportunities among communities of color and low-income communities. We will work closely with landlords and others to make sure that leasing agents are well-trained to eliminate bias in their interactions.”

### **About the Audit Methodology**

FHCO sent out white, African-American and Latino testers to apply for rental apartments throughout Multnomah County. Each tester is given a profile that details where they should seek housing, and information about income, whether or not they are married or have children, why they are seeking new housing. The profiles are nearly identical except for their race and national origin.

For any given test there are three possible results: (1) the test shows different treatment, (2) the test does not show different treatment, and (3) the test is inconclusive. FHCO performed 25 tests based on race and 25 tests based on national origin.

“In order for us break free from our collective past, we must be willing to honestly look at ourselves and admit where we have failed to achieve an integrated society”, said Moley Good, Executive Director of FHCO. “We applaud the City of Portland for taking this hard look at discrimination and committing to efforts to eliminate it. We are working closely with the City of Portland to raise awareness about fair housing laws, educate landlords and advocacy groups about their fair housing rights and responsibilities, and assist individuals in Portland who may have experienced illegal discrimination.”

### **Members of the Fair Housing Advisory Committee**

The Fair Housing Advisory Committee has been meeting since November 2010 and is preparing to unveil their recommendations in May. Members of the Committee are as follows:

Elisa Aguilera, Community Alliance of Tenants  
Donna Childs, Elders in Action  
Andrew Colas, Colas Construction, Inc.  
Alyssa Cudmore, Fair Housing Council of Oregon  
Jeanne Davidson, Portland Youth & Elders Council  
Donita Fry, Portland Youth & Elders Council, NAYA Family Center  
Moley Good, Fair Housing Council of Oregon  
Cashauna Hill, Oregon Law Center  
Deborah Imse, Metro Multi-Family Housing Association

Liv Jenssen, Multnomah County Dept. of Community Justice  
Ethan Krow, Center for Intercultural Organizing  
Walter Lander, Providence Hospital  
Christine Lau, Asian Health & Service Center  
Ben Loftis, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Inc.  
Phil Owen, Rental Housing Association of Greater Portland  
Andrew Riley, Center for Intercultural Organizing  
Molly Rogers, Housing Development Center  
Ryan Roser, community member  
Emily S. Ryan, community member  
Neisha Saxena, Disability Rights Oregon  
Lynne Walker, community member  
Jenny Weinstein, Portland State University Institute on Aging  
Bruce Whiting, Key Bank Community Development Banking

#### **About the Portland Housing Bureau**

The mission of the Portland Housing Bureau is to focus community resources on the unmet housing needs of the people of Portland. To learn more about PHB, visit <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/PHB>

#### **About the Fair Housing Council of Oregon**

The mission of the Fair Housing Council of Oregon is to eliminate illegal housing discrimination throughout Oregon and SW Washington. To learn more about FHCO visit [www.fhco.org](http://www.fhco.org).